

September 23, 1999

Mr. Lester Snow, Executive Director  
CalFed Bay/Delta Program  
1416 Ninth Street, Suite 1155  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Mr Snow:

My wife and I attended the CalFed public meeting at the Convention Center last night. We were not surprised to hear the usual rhetoric. In fact, I filled out a "request to speak" form, but found as the evening progressed that my statement would just have been another example of the rhetoric, but with a slightly different spin, and who needed that? So we left earlier than we originally intended.

What no one who spoke seemed to realize was that everyone of us in California is looking at what historically we never thought we would ever have to look at: limits. There is simply not enough water for all our water needs if we continue to use it as we use it now. The farmers seem to think there would be enough water, at least for them, if more dams were built. Environmentalists, who know that dams silt up in the long run, become useless and, at the same time, spell death for species, think that conservation will provide enough water for everyone, including farmers, if water is just not wasted--through metering, reuse, drip irrigation, etc. Urban dwellers just want water to come out of their taps. Real estate developers keep building, confident that, with enough money, land and water can be bought so the homes and businesses they build can be supplied. Industry seems to think the same thing as the developers. But the truth is, there is not, and never will be, enough water in California to serve the needs of those who believe they can continue to do what they've always done the way they've always done it.

The farmers, who clearly packed the meeting with their presence and speakers, cannot continue to speak en bloc, as though every one of them is a 3rd or 4th or 5th generation California farmer, owns the old family farm, practices intensive cultivation and raises food for Californians and Americans. We all know that millions of acres of California land are "farmed" by huge Agri-Corporations that use the rhetoric of the family farm to mask industrial production of food and

fiber, often using water and land wastefully, getting enormous subsidies for non-food crops like cotton, which also require vast amounts of chemical toxins to grow to maturity. We all know that cattle ranchers, while they raise "food," raise a kind of food that consumes far vaster amounts of water and food (not to mention the destruction caused to waterways by cattle's uncontrolled wanderings) than the food value beef provides. We also know that much rice production in the Sacramento Valley, besides being heavily subsidized, goes overseas and never sees the California or U.S. markets.

It is simply not true, as some of the farmers protested, that farmers are water users not water consumers. Evaporation out of reservoirs (used to store water for farmers), irrigation ditches and canals (used to deliver water to farms and ranches), orchard flooding, rice fields, and as I've mentioned, cattle raising, all consume millions of acre feet of water, as does the flushing required to prevent salinization of soils.

Finally, the plea that there be "balance" in the deliberations of Cal Fed sounds peculiar to the ear of one like myself who knows the history of agriculture in California. For over one hundred years there was enormous imbalance in the attention and money given to "agriculture" in the state. How else account for the great dam and canal projects built by taxpayer money to benefit farmers? How else account for the technical assistance provided by the University of California and Polytechnic colleges to the agriculture industry? How else account for the shabby treatment and low pay accorded migrant farm workers, supported by state and local officials and police over the years? Now the farmers want balance, which apparently to them means more of the same of what they already have. They and their Farm Bureau agents speak collectively, as though there is no difference between Joe Masumoto on his 160 acre peach and raisin farm outside Sanger and the Dole Company or Foster Farms.

Since the 1960s we have gotten used to talking about "Spaceship Earth." Well now we have to begin talking about "Lifeboat Earth." Not only are we running out of non-renewable resources, we are running out of renewable resources, like land and water, at an even faster rate. And California, founded on the tradition of "no limits" may well be the first place on earth, other than true desert regions, to have to confront the reality of very stark limits, limits imposed by the fact that it is a dry state, subject to prolonged droughts. I suppose there is no constitutional

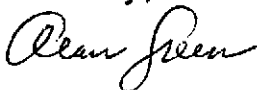
way we can limit our population growth. Then we will have to limit our water consumption growth, as apparently Southern California has already begun to do out of dire necessity.

In the urban and suburban and even rural areas, wherever possible, water needs to be metered, with higher charges levied for higher use. Where metering is legally prohibited, the law must be changed. Water re-use technology must be instituted in all major metropolitan areas, as it has been in Southern California. In some locations in Southern California, water is re-used by households eight times before it flows into the sea, with no ill-effects.

In the agricultural sector, the farmers and ranchers themselves are going to have to differentiate themselves instead of seeking shelter under a single umbrella called "the family farm." They are not fooling anyone but themselves. No crop that requires vast amounts of water use, price subsidies, and soil-poisoning pesticides and herbicides can be allowed to continue, and we can begin with cotton. Marginal lands that require much more water because of alkali or other soil chemicals that must be leached out to grow anything, must be taken out of cultivation. Cattle raising must give way to more efficient and nutritious food crops. Wasteful water use by farmers must be eliminated (and farmers know that such practices continue to exist, despite their public protestations). Non-human species death (species that depend on abundant clean water flows) must stop. Only then can we begin to think about how water can be allocated in a balanced way so that farmers can have the water they need to raise the food that all of us admittedly need, and that the state can sustain.

It's time that all of us stop posturing, pointing fingers and pretending that the old methods are just fine and that all we need is more of the same. Those days are gone. We have to start practicing truth telling and understand that all of us are on a lifeboat, not on a luxury cruise liner. We have to start thinking hard about what we have to throw overboard and do without if we and the life forms of the state we love are to survive.

Sincerely,



Alan Green

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